

MONTHLY RETROSPECT OF POLITICS.

On virtue can alone this kingdom stand,
 On public virtue, every virtue join'd :
 For lost this social cement of mankind,
 The greatest Empires, by scarce felt de-
 grees,
 Will moulder soft away, till tottering
 loose,
 They prone at last to total ruin rush.
 What are without it Senates, save a face
 Of consultation deep, and reason free,
 While the determin'd voice and heart are
 sold ?
 What boasted Freedom, save an empty
 name ?
 And what Election, but a *market rule*
Of Slaves self-barter'd ?

THOMSON'S LIBERTY.

IT is refreshing to look back at the poets of former days, and contrast them with many of the present day. Yet these animated advocates of liberty, from Milton, to the poets who flourished in the times of the first two Georges, were abused by the *penioned* Johnson, for their adherence to the cause of freedom. He who had been the supporter of the exiled dynasty of Stuart, and long opposed the house of Brunswick, in the beginning of the present reign found it no great transition to pass into the opposite service, and become the venal supporter of that faction, which from the days of Bute have stamped a character on the present times. Such sentiments, as are contained in the lines, which form the motto to the present retrospect, and similar passages, which are thickly interspersed through the writings of Pope, Thomson, Gray, and Akenside, engage the veneration and gratitude of posterity to the authors, notwithstanding the present fashion of fastidious squeamishness, which makes some of our present poets affirm that they have nothing to do with politics; and notwithstanding the snarling of Johnson, who in styling those effu-

sions of liberty, mere declamations in favour of freedom, which was in no danger, affords to us a clue to judge of himself, and his writings. For it is no uncommon circumstance, unjustly to accuse others of intentions, which are only suggested by the conscience of the accuser. Thus on his own evidence, perhaps, it may be no injustice to accuse Johnson as acting the part of a sophist, and being merely the declaimer in many of his far-famed writings, both on politics and morals, and the sturdy morality, as it has been styled, of the Rambler, may, if tried in the balance he unjustly applied to others, be found to center in pomposity of expression, and with very little of the genuine feelings of the heart.

To literature, however, the cause of freedom is much indebted for many able defenders, although some otherwise eminent and learned men, have prostituted their talents to gloss over the defects of arbitrary power. In our last retrospect, we alluded to the difference between learning, or knowledge, and wisdom. They are essentially different. Cowper has well illustrated their opposite properties

..... " Here the heart
 " May give a useful lesson to the head,
 And learning wiser grow without his
 books.
 Knowledge and wisdom far from being
 one,
 Have oftimes no connexion. Knowledge
 dwells
 In heads replete with thoughts of other
 men,
 Wisdom in minds attentive to their own.
 Knowledge, a rude unprofitable mass,
 The mere materials with which wisdom
 builds,
 'Till smooth'd, and squar'd, and fitted to
 it's place,

Does but encumber, whom it seems t'enrich,
 Knowledge is proud, that he has learned
 so much,
 Wisdom is humble, that he knows no
 more.

Books are not seldom talismans and spells,
 By which the magic art of shrewder wits
 Holds an *unthinking* multitude enthral'd."

Writers are only useful so far as they excite others to think, and to reflect; to compare and judge: to form their verdicts on the evidence adduced to them: and it is of far more importance to a nation, that authors should exert themselves to assist the multitude to think, than to prescribe the line of thought for them. Then only can knowledge be ancillary to wisdom, and literature profitably aid the cause of liberty. It is of more importance that the many should be incited to reflect on their own interests, and the interests of the nation; than that the few should display their learning, or their wit; otherwise science may be made to prop the cause of despotism, and learning draw from the consideration of our rights. As an apology for the supposed intrusion of those remarks on literature into a political retrospect, it may be sufficient to remark, that the subjects here treated on, have no very remote connexion with the *genuine science and philosophy of politics*.

The press is an impassive instrument, and may be or otherwise, as it is directed. As literature has in some cases been made subservient to the purposes of despotism, so the press, as the instrument of literature, may instruct or mislead, and this view of the question is daily exemplified in the state of the periodical publications, of which the greater number are leagued on the side of power. Pay and patronage are readily derived from this quarter, and when these circum-

stances are considered, we need not wonder at the systematic deception practised by many of the public prints. But it is not enough, that so many are under pay, intimidation is used to silence the refractory. The late prosecutions in England are alarming to the friends of a free press, and if the system succeed, bids fair to stop free discussion, for few have sufficient strength of nerves to write boldly, under the impending dread of a two years imprisonment. In England, public spirit has latterly shown a little tendency to revive, and there appear symptoms of resuscitation, after a period of suspended animation. Instead of gently cherishing this tendency, strong efforts are used to repress this restoration of the languid powers, and the press is not permitted to breathe freely. In such a crisis, what is the line for the enlightened friends of freedom to pursue? Probably not to expose themselves unprotected to the shafts of power, or to sufferings, for the sake of *an ungrateful people*, who are more prone to blame, than to succour their defenders. Still less can an honest man hark in with the present cry. Sincerity prevents the show of approbation, and indignation will not let him be entirely silent. Reserving himself for better times, he must be cautious, and endeavour to exemplify the wisdom of prudence, and the unbroken spirit of a virtuous disapprobation of profligacy and corruption. He must be especially careful of countenancing a departure from the line of rectitude, or by *an unrighteous condescension*, to betray the cause of honour and honesty! At least he ought to keep himself pure in word, and thought, and deed, from participating in those things, which he disapproves. If he can do nothing

availingly for his country, he must do nothing against her interest, and withhold with firmness, all seeming to approve, what his heart disowns. Let us keep in remembrance, that despotism is more to be dreaded than anarchy, and that the slow consuming disease of corruption, is often more fatal than the fever of licentiousness.

We, in general, agree with that sturdy champion of the people, Mr. Cobbet, whose imprisonment, like the condensation of air in an air gun, only serves to increase energy, and elasticity, while the words "State Prison, Newgate," seem only to operate as a cartridge, which more effectually rams down the contents, makes the report snarier, and its effects surer. But in several points we differ from him, and in no one point more, than in the one contained in the following sentence, which we consider as in its spirit, a perfect *anglicism*, grateful, we fear too grateful to the English ear, but although a pet principle of Mr. Cobbet, is not the less selfish, partial, and iniquitous in itself, and inconsistent with the rights of men, and of nations.

"As to the expediency of the measure, says he, (viz—the abrogation of the orders of council,) if the obligations of good faith were wholly out of the question, being thoroughly convinced, that, first or last, we shall come to the plain, simple, unqualified assertion and maintenance of the absolute sovereignty of the sea, or make up our minds, or rather debase them, which, I trust, we never shall, to submit to become first an *inferior* nation, and next, by an easy transition, to become the vassal of France, now being thoroughly convinced of this, &c—"

We have professed ourselves, on all occasions, inimical to that mo-

nopolizing system, and spirit of exclusion, which makes nations, as well as individuals, the objects of fear, and hatred to their neighbours. We have felt much, as Irishmen, from the effects of this domineering spirit, and we have therefore perhaps less scruple as men, in declaring, such a spirit to be a curse to other countries, and to its own, eventual ruin. This assertion of an *absolute sovereignty of the sea*, appears to be a sounding of the trumpet for interminable war, or at least a war never to end until Rome or Carthage be utterly destroyed, and rased from the list of nations. It is indeed a declaration of war *against the world*, and we think the effect of such declarations from party writers, known to speak, in general, the sentiments of the people at large, must be to make all the nations on the continent *volunteers* in the service of France, rather than be, as is supposed, *pressed* into it, on seeing that the *people*, of this country as well as the actual administration, are equally well inclined to close up the ocean for their own benefit, or to erect turnpike-gates on what providence intended as a free high-road for the world. It is such an unfavourable impression of the British character, thus propagated, with strong confirmation, through the medium of a popular writer like Mr. C. which does Napoleon such good service, makes all Europe clasp his knees as a deliverer from the great monster of the deep, and elevates him into the *liberator*, not as he is, the *subjugator* of the globe.

There was long a distinction willingly made on the continent between the people and the casual ministerial government of Britain, but such domineering assertions, (the offspring of pride, not of any generous prin-

principle), of absolute sovereignty over the great common of the ocean, made by one of the people themselves, high, perhaps highest in their confidence and estimation, must fix an inveterate hostility on the continent, against the nation itself, and very name of Britain. The people are thus, in the eyes of the nations, completely incorporated, and identified with the administration, however it may change; and it must be concluded abroad, that the same vital, or mortal maxim, will continue to be the spring of political action in this country; even tho' in the dice-box of human events, William Cobbett should succeed to the place in the cabinet formerly occupied by William Pitt.

In the orders of council, (11th Nov. 1807,) it says, "his Majesty is taking measures for asserting and vindicating his just rights, and for supporting that maritime power, which the exertions, and valour of his people have enabled him to establish, and maintain, and the maintenance of which is not more essential to the safety and prosperity of his Majesty's dominions, than it is to the protection of such states as shall retain their independence, and to the general intercourse, and happiness of mankind". This paragraph if not already understood by the nations on the continent, must be well illustrated by Mr. Cobbett's phrase of plain, simple, unqualified assertion and maintenance of the absolute sovereignty of the sea, which, he adds, is necessary to the independence of England.

For our parts, we can see nothing in this expression, but a cunning attempt, (most inconsistent with such a manly mind), to confound two things totally different, as if they must stand or fall together, national independence, and universal sovereignty. God forbid that their Inde-

pendence of any single country, should depend upon an exclusive and absolute domination, incompatible with the rights and natural endeavours of every other country, to make the best use of their resources, and their industry. Perish the independence of that country, where such are the only means of supporting it! We see no such alternative as necessary, either to be absolute sovereign of the sea, or an "inferior power," and "the vassal of France." We need neither be tyrants nor slaves. Let us be a fair, honourable, and liberal nation, not led astray by a purblind pedlar policy, but actuated by a generous ambition of outstripping all our competitors, in the great mart of the world, by superior activity, industry, mind, and machinery. While such maxims, as we glory to have thus reprobated, are the ruling maxims of cabinets, and what is worse, of countries, how can the feeling heart or the considerate head rejoice in victory, or sympathise in defeat? It is a combat between the LION and the TIGER.—The quiet inhabitants tremble, whatever be the issue of the contest; and the forest rebellows with the savage roar.

The renovation of the liberty of the press, by the Spanish Cortes, on further explanation, is found to be only a half-measure, as it is still restricted with regard to discussions on the subject of religion. In restoring the lost liberties of a country, a capitulation with abuses, damps the rising spirit of the people. In the present case, a suspicion of ultimate success in regenerating Spain is justly excited. It would be desirable to see greater energy. Yet there is a faint resemblance between the popular language used by some speakers in the Cortes, to the conduct of the first French national as-

sembly. Our ideas are some times carried back to that period of great hope and we are not unpleasingly reminded of some similitude. The French revolution was marred by a combination of circumstances, for which liberty is not justly blameable. The restoration of liberty, and the removal of long confirmed oppression are objects of anxious desideration to the lovers of the cause of freedom all over the world. To them however, the present scenes in Spain, furnish more causes for painful anxiety, than for joyful expectation. Some in the Cortes speak highly of the state of liberty in Britain: So did many of the members of the first French assemblies. Things viewed at a distance often look better, than a nearer and a more close inspection will justify.

Our war-loving empire are now in a fair way of being soon tired of their favourite game. Until repeated disappointments, and great distresses teach them better, they are fond of war. As in the case of the American war, it would not be surprising if the tide of popular opinion would ere long turn in favour of peace. That war was for a long period popular, but at length the conductors of it were forced to resign, and peace was made. The public and private financial distress, and the disappointment of the high-raised hopes of almost annihilating with speed the French army in Portugal, are forcing the people to feel. The general pressure of distress coming home, individually, often excites minds to reflect, which are completely callous to other considerations. If they are little sensible to general inconvenience and miseries, their own sufferings rouse them, and they are quick to perceive wherein they are pinched.—The crisis is now arrived, when most

people are forced to acknowledge, that the effects of the war are brought home to them, in one shape or another. The ill success of the English fleet at the Isle of France, being a failure in that source of strength, hitherto supposed to be invincible, although the extent of the loss is not very great, may tend to abate the high confidence, and cause some misgivings, as to the omnipotence of our boasted security. All considerations combined, may gradually tend to produce a disposition for peace.

To enable our readers to form a just estimate of our Portuguese allies, for whom nominally our government is so lavish of the blood and treasure of the nation, although perhaps the true motives may be found in a desire to retain place by an affected display of vigour, and an inclination rather to do mischief than to do nothing, we shall give some extracts from "Robert Semple's second journey to Spain, in the spring of 1809." They may assist in disabusing the people of some prejudices, and show for what we are fighting

"The mob of Lisbon was armed, and determined to show that it was so. Every night, at least one Frenchman, or one suspected to be so, was discovered and dragged to prison, where, generally, his dead body alone arrived. I myself was witness to an Englishman being murdered in this manner, and strove in vain to save his life. An Englishman! you exclaim. Yes, reader, an Englishman. It was on a Sunday evening, and I was proceeding up the principal street, when having advanced a little beyond the head quarters of the English general, I heard the shoutings of a great mob. They drew nearer, and I presently found myself enveloped amidst a furious crowd, dragging along a poor

wretch in an English dress; his countenance disfigured with blood, and hardly able to stagger along from the blows which he had received. I demanded his crime. They told me he was a Frenchman, but an English officer who was in the crowd, exclaimed that it was his servant, and endeavoured to reason with some who appeared as leaders of the mob. At this intelligence, I made my utmost efforts to get near the unfortunate man, and just arrived in time to seize with both my hands a pike which some brave Portuguese from behind was endeavouring to thrust into his back. I called out to the officer to assist me. He replied, it was the *positive order of the General, that in all such cases, no Englishman should interfere*, and advised me to take care of my own life. I was in the midst of pikes, swords, and daggers, which seemed to be thrust about in all directions, as if through madness or intoxication. In spite of all my struggles, I was thrown down and nearly trampled upon by the mob, and at length with difficulty escaped from amongst them. Next morning, I was informed that the poor wretch had been murdered in the course of the night. And this passed within one hundred yards of the English head quarters."

"The English have supported a regency odious to the people, and have lost more by that, and the convention of Cintra, than they have gained at Vimeira. The French are attacking in all directions, old and corrupted establishments, ready to fall by their own weight. We fly to prop them up with the whole of England's strength. The natural consequence is, that the people of most countries execrate the French, but find it hard to condemn many of their measures; while on the con-

trary, the English are very generally beloved, and their measures execrated. The former government of Portugal, of which the present regency is the representative, was a very bad one. Its oppressions and its ignorance are alike notorious. Yet we have linked ourselves to this government, and not to the people. We make no appeals, as it were, directly from nation to nation. All that we say comes to the people through the medium of magistrates, not beloved nor respected, farther than that they hold an arbitrary power in their hands.

"I beheld at Lisbon a government hated yet implicitly obeyed; and this was to me a kind of clue to the national character, where the hereditary rights of tyrannizing in the great, and long habits of servitude in the multitude, compose the principal traits. But the people are awakened; they are appealed to; they are armed and habits of freedom will by degrees arise among them. Never. This nation, with all its old rites, its superstitions, and its prejudices of three centuries, is in its decrepitude. To produce any good, the whole race must be renewed. Their present enthusiasm, produced by the pressure and the concurrence of wonderful circumstances, proves to me nothing."

To confirm feeling minds in their detestation of the horrid trade of war, the following anecdote extracted from the same author, may serve better than volumes of declamation. Such scenes of private distresses are common amid the destructive ravages attendant on warfare.

"Our protracted stay at Posadas enabled me to witness one of those scenes which mark as it were, the very outskirts of war, and affect us more than those of greater

horror. A poor woman of the place had been informed that her only son was killed in battle, and she of course had given herself up to grief; but this very morning a peasant arrived with certain intelligence, not only that her son was living, but that he was actually approaching the village, and not above a league distant from it. The first shock of these good tidings overpowered the mother's feelings, she ran out into the streets uttering screams of joy, and telling every one she met, that he was not dead, that he was living, that he was approaching, that he would soon be in his dear mother's house. After some time she exclaimed, "But why do I stop here? Come away, come away, and meet him," and so saying, attired as she was, she hurried into the road, and soon disappeared. But what can describe her return? Her son lived, but alas! how changed since last she saw him! His arm had been carried away by a cannon-ball, the bandages of his wound were dyed with blood; he was pale and emaciated, and so weak, that he was with difficulty supported on his ass, in a kind of cradle, by the help of a peasant who walked by his side.— On the other side walked his mother; now looking down on the ground, now up to heaven, but chiefly on her son, with anxious eyes, and a countenance in which joy and grief exultation and despondency, reigned by turns."

Bernadotte, himself a warrior, has in his address to the diet of Sweden, feelingly described the horrors of war, and ingenuously, and most probably with sincerity, expressed his dislike of it. He has also told us, with the same apparent sincerity, for which we may give credit from internal evidence, that Bonaparte amid his victories has often *sighed for peace*.*

votaries for war in these countries may now be probably gratified to the full extent of their wishes. Sweden has already declared war, and the United States of America are on the point of entering on hostile measures, provided wisdom in our administration, or haply in their successors do not avert the blow. The time also may not be far distant, when the contest with the legions of Bonaparte may be on our own territory. In this country we have had some fatal specimens of the practical horrors of war. In England, little has been known of war for a long time, but as a business to talk of, and they have contemplated it so circumstanced with great indifference, and cool-bloodedness. It remains to be seen how far they will accommodate practice to unfeeling theory, if they should experience brought home to themselves, the destructive horrors, which while ravaging other nations, they have coldly contemplated.

Massena has changed his position in Portugal, without Lord Wellington having it in his power to prevent this change, or the junction of a reinforcement under General Drouot.—Other detachments are expected to follow. It is not difficult to prognosticate the event of the business, when the French feel themselves sufficiently strong from the superiority of numbers, and their reinforcements being greatly augmented, to become the assailants. The troops sent from Great Britain and Ireland will most probably be in far less numbers. The French, notwithstanding the confident assertions of news-writers, and their correspondents, who abundantly supply us with the vague rumours of the camp, do not appear to have been greatly in want of provisions. Some alarming al-

* See Page 447 of this Magazine.

prehensions may now be entertained during the detention of the supplies from England and Ireland, from contrary winds not only for the British army, but for the miserable inhabitants of Lisbon, now so much crowded with fugitives. Notwithstanding all the fair glosses of systematic and long practised deception, the ensuing spring will probably by the issue manifest the real situation of our affairs in Portugal. The termination of our expeditions only effectually remedies the delusion.

The Linen-board have abolished the office of inspector-general, as useless, and attended with great expense. We are also informed, that they have ordered the late inspector-general to be prosecuted at law, for his attempt to suborn two of the county inspectors to commit perjury to screen his peculations. This act of apparent virtue may not be intitled to great merit. The dread of parliamentary inquiry, and the fear of the abolition of the board cannot be supposed to be without their effects. It may be asked, why the linen trade should not, like other trades, be able to stand alone, and be protected by the common execution of the law, in case of frauds, without the intervention of a board, powerful only for the purposes of dispensing patronage?

The public attention has been with great propriety turned to the case of a catholic soldier in a regiment of Irish militia. For declining to march to church with his regiment, he was ordered into confinement, though the right of chusing his religion is confirmed to him by law. While in confinement he wrote a letter of remonstrance, in which he was considered not to have complained with sufficient gentleness, to please his superiors. He was brought to a court-martial, and sentenced to receive 1000 lashes

This sentence was afterwards commuted to service for life in a condemned regiment, a change only from most severe to greatly severe, and he was sent as far as the isle of Wight, on his way to the West Indies. On the remonstrance of Doctor Troy, he has been since brought back, and obtained his discharge from the army, and we are told the sentence has been pronounced improperly severe by the Irish commander-in-chief. Yet still no disapprobation has been publicly expressed of the conduct of the officer, who brought him to trial, nor of the court-martial, who pronounced the excessive punishment. This business is likely to be brought forward for investigation in a court of law, and in the imperial parliament.

In consequence of the King's indisposition both houses of parliament appointed committees to examine the physicians who attended him. The fact of his derangement and consequent incapacity to discharge the regal functions are established by these reports. The physicians nevertheless express confident hopes of his recovery. The house of commons have proceeded to declare the incapacity, and have determined by a majority of 112, to constitute the Prince of Wales regent, during the incapacity, by bill, instead of an address. In the present early stage of this business, and as many alterations may be yet made, it is not to be expected that in a monthly account, we should give a complete detail of the transactions, so far as they have already proceeded. It may suffice to notice, that there is much reliance on precedent, lawyer-like rather looking to what has been done at a former period, than to what ought to be done. There will probably be extended scope for political cabal, and abundance of rival jockeyship displayed, by those now in place, and those who are eagerly desirous of

succeeding to power. But amid these struggles of party, the interests of the nation should be paramount in the nation's view. To the people it is of far more importance, instead of the question of limitation, or non-limitation of the regency, or whose names shall be read as ministers in the court-calendar, that effectual limitations should be put on the encroachments of power, in whose handssoever it may be vested, that corruption should be effectually restrained, and the rights of the nation secured by a wise system of reform, set about in good earnest, and undeviatingly pursued, till the accumulating abuses of successive years be removed.

In the mean time, the present ministers hold to the wreck of their places with great tenacity; resolved, if they are not able to retain their places, that they will limit their successors as much as possible; and the majority in the house of commons as yet support them. This is not to be wondered at. Whoever is minister at the time of a general election, has the command of returning their adherents for the treasury boroughs, and owing to the infatuation of a popular cry, ministers had, at the election in 1807, more influence than usual, over places not so directly under their control. We refer to the conclusion of our motto, for the hurtful consequences of such a system. Influence thus exacted, is the fruitful source of corruption, and the bane of freedom.

PUBLIC OCCURRENCES.

RESOLUTIONS OF BLEACHERS.

On the 9th of last month a meeting of the proprietors of bleachgreens in the neighbourhood of Belfast, was held in the white linen-hall, which was numerously attended. Entire unanimity prevailed on the subject of petitioning parliament to change

the punishment of robbing bleachgreens from death to transportation for life, or a system of confinement in penitentiary houses, if the legislature should adopt the plan of Sir Samuel Romilly in respect to the erection and management of such places of confinement. To be of any service, they must certainly be managed very differently from our gaols. In America they are popularly called *BETTERING HOUSES*, a title to which our gaols can lay no claim. It is truly pleasing to observe that the public mind is rapidly progressive on the subject of an alteration in our criminal code, and that the sentiment gains ground dictated alike by humanity and sound policy, to substitute milder punishments strictly inflicted, to greater severity, as the extreme rigour of a law defeats its own purpose, by being only sanguinary in the letter, while it is very laxly enforced.

The following are the resolutions adopted at the meeting:

At a meeting of the proprietors of linen and cotton bleach-works, held in Belfast, the 9th of November, 1810.

JOHN M^CCANCEP, esq in the Chair;

The following Resolutions were agreed to ..

That notwithstanding the severity of the law, which punishes the robbing of bleachgreens with death, offences of this kind continue to be multiplied, owing, in great measure, to the lenity of prosecutors, the unwillingness of juries to convict, and the general leaning to the side of mercy, when the punishment is, by the common consent of mankind, considered as disproportioned to the offence.

That the severity of the law having been found to defeat the execution of it we are of the opinion, that it would tend to the diminution of crimes, and the more effectual punishment of offenders, if certainty of punishment were substituted for severity.

That a petition to the house of Commons, praying a change of the punishment of death to transportation for life, or a lengthened period of confinement in penitentiary houses, provided a system of confinement in such houses should hereafter be adopted by the Legislature, having been agreed to by this meeting, be forwarded to Sir Samuel Romilly, to present on the meeting of parliament.

That William Stevenson, Archibald Barklie, William Thomson, Robert Williams, and John Hancock, are appointed a Committee to procure names to this pe-